7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

527 which time the Senators, as well as the
431 knights and other great men, brought
171 gifts to the Emperor, and in his absence to the Capitol (1).

527 It is also the custom in some places
•777 of Malta for men to go about strewing some lime in the door-ways on New Year's day. Some idea of good luck may perhaps be associated with the lime; there is no tradition, however, as far as is known, whence this custom arose.

527 New Year's greetings in the shape
203 of visiting cards, are very profusely exchanged on this occasion, especially among the better classes.

527 Groups of street musicians go from
431 house to house, either on the last day
533 of the old year or on the morning of

(1) Capitol, the temple of Jupiter at Rome built on the top of a hill.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

THE GHOST OF THE HOUSE

776 777 825 Some of our people believe in what they call *Il Hâres*—and some of our country-folk still say that this *hâres* exists in the shape af an old black serpent which guards the house and bestows riches and good luck on the children born in that house.

It is held extremely unlucky to kill the old black serpent, as after its death great misfortunes will befall the members of the family.

GOOD LUCK

787 823 [777] Many believe in their fortune or luck (especially maidens) according to the figures formed by melted lead.

On the Feast of St. John—24th of June—some lead is melted and immediately poured into a vessel containing

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

THE ITCHING OF THE EYE

787 826 [977] The itching of the eye is considered as an unlucky omen. Grose, celebrated antiquarian, who collected together so many of the superstitions prevalent in his day, says: "When the right eye itches the party affected will shortly cry."

THE ITCHING OF THE HAND

Among other omens we are told that the itching of the hands signifies that they will shortly receive money.

HOWLING OF DOGS

825 763 A superstitious opinion vulgarly prevails in Malta that the howling of a dog in a neighbourhood is the presage of death to any that are sick in it.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

787 826 denotes that a friend is speaking well of one: a tingling of the left, implying the opposite.

[171] The opinion, from whence this proverbial saying is derived, is of great antiquity, being thus mentioned by Pliny: "Moreover is not this an opinion generally received that when our ears do glow and tingle some there be that in our absence do talk of us?"

MEETING OF WOMEN

846 787 777 If two women who have been confined on the same day meet before forty days, one of them will suffer some misfortune either in her own person or in that of her child.

THE MONTH OF MAY

777 May is considered as the month of accidents, and consequently many be-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

lieve that those who get married during this month will be unfortunate. 777 •

THE CHURCH ORGAN

Many of our country people want the organ to be played during the mass which is celebrated at their wedding, for they believe that if it is not played the couple will not live long together. To show how much some of our country men believe in this superstition, my friend, Mr. P. P. Castagna, gives the following anecdote in his "Storia ta Malta." 787 585 533

Not long ago a young man went to church at Casal Chircop to get married. On finding, however, that the organist did not turn up to play during the mass, he took off his coat threw it on the floor and went out

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

THE ACACIA OR SPONGE-TREE

(Gazzïa)

824 Our ancestors had a strong aversion to introducing or bringing in the acacia or sponge-tree with the other flower-plants in the house.

[763] They believed that if the acacia were brought into the house the head thereof would die within twelve months.

THE NEWT

825 Our superstitiously inclined believe that when one kills a newt and leaves its tail contorting or wagging on the floor, that tail will be cursing the parents of its destroyer!

COAL-DUST AND SOOT

• 777 529 The throwing of coal-dust or soot instead of lime before a door on New year's day betokens gloom and bad luck.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

NEW YEAR'S SUPERSTITIONS

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763
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A superstitious dread still attaches to some one of the family keeping absent at dinner time on New Year's day. He who doesn't dine with his family on New Year's day is expected to die at the end of that same year.

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262
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He who eats hotch-potch soup on New year's day is to gnaw the ham bones all the rest of the year.

Those who eat cabbages on New year's day groan for a whole year.

OIL, SALT AND WINE

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The spilling of oil is considered a very unlucky omen by the Maltese. The spilling of salt or wine, however, betokens good luck.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

THROWING STONES IN A WELL

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Our ancestors made children believe that if they threw stones in a well or into the sea they had to lift them up some day with their eyelashes.

THIRTEEN AT TABLE

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Sitting down thirteen to dinner is considered very unlucky.

The notion is that one of the thirteen will die within the next twenty four hours. The origin popularly assigned to this widespread superstition is the fact that thirteen was the number at the Last Supper, Judas being the thirteenth.

SNEEZING

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The custom of saying "Evviva" or "Sahha" to one who happens to sneeze

T: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

827 prevails in Malta as in other parts of the world. (*)

DREAMS

787 There is also a popular superstition in Malta to give interpretation to certain dreams.

The Maltese say that to dream of

777 (a) fish betokens good luck

(b) the sea foreshews a great trouble

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771 (*) Carolus Sigonius in his Hist. of Italy would deduce this custom from a pestilence that happened in the time of Gregory the Great (about the year 750) that proved mortal to such as sneezed.

In Brand's "Popular Antiquities" we read that the custom of saluting a person who sneezed was accounted very ancient, even in the time of Aristotle, who in his Problems has endeavoured to account for it, but knew nothing of its origin. According to him, the first men prepossessed with the ideas concerning the head as the principal seat of the soul, carried their respect to sternutation, as the most manifest and the most sensible operation of the head. Hence those several forms of compliments used on similar occasions amongst Greeks and Romans: *Long may you live, May you enjoy health.*

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

(c) corn portends bitter crying through a misfortune

(d) lentils signifies hunger.

COMMON AILMENTS

At the present day, in spite of the "march of intellect" most of the ordinary ailments of every day life have still, what are popularly termed in folk medicine, their "charm remedies" consisting in very quaint recipes which from time immemorial, have been handed down from parent to child.

The following are the complaints to which more or less eccentric remedies have always been applied.

Bleeding of the nose—A curious remedy for the bleeding of the nose is to place a key on the person's back. The key is resorted to as a charm in

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

she honours and calls upon in her sister's hour of need. The tale is told of the birth-rose which was forgotten. Triplets were born. Later the rose was found, having grown on its withered stem three healthy branches bearing fresh, green leaves. Whatever deep significance attached originally to the birth-rose, the custom has a beauty of its own.

The next thought is for the little one's future. A gold ring or some other golden object is placed in the water in which he or she is washed, in order, they say, that riches will not be lacking. At one time, it may be, something of more value than the dross of riches was sought, for gold was the symbol of wisdom and a bright understanding long before it had value as currency.

It will be well if the baby is not red-headed, for the red-headed child will inevitably be known as "Son of the Wind," "Daughter of the alcove," or even more scurrilously, "Child of the priest." This readiness to doubt the paternity of poor little "Copper-knob" seems to indicate that, in spite of the blue or grey eyes of the peasants, the Maltese have always been an essentially brunette people. The slur may be no older than the occupation of the priestly knights, when celibacy must frequently have proved too much for the young "Aryans" of the Teutonic Langues. It may date back to the much earlier time of red-bearded Ullyses. It may, again, be nothing more than a rendering of "love-child"—for red has always been the colour of Love—sacred to Astoreth, Isis, and Venus.

Yet another of the Old Things has a hand in birth. Even to-day it is accounted by some a serious matter for a child to be born on Christmas Eve. Such a child is in danger of becoming a *Gaugau*—one whose spirit will leave its body every Christmas Eve—"They then go out and wander all over the island frightening people with their groanings. After thus performing these ghostly pranks for some hours,

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

these transformed creatures return home towards dawn quite exhausted and awake in the morning quite unconscious of their nocturnal expedition."[1] The derivation of the word *Gaugau* has been given as the Syrian *Hagogo*, a ghost; but surely the *Gaugau* is more than a simple ghost. His behaviour stamps him as a vampire. Busuttil says that "the yearly punishment" is thought to be inflicted because Christ "does not like anyone to be born at the same time he was born," and then suggests that the *Gaugau* came into Malta with the Phoenicians. The Phoenician origin and the popular explanation seem quite irreconcilable until it is recalled that—

> "It is well known that in the transition from paganry to Christianity the Christian clergy, finding it impossible to wean the populace from old customs or to eradicate primitive beliefs, discreetly met the situation by diverting pagan festivals to the honour of Christ. It is not so generally known that December 25th, the Christmas Day of Christendom, was necessarily thus fixed for the reason that this date was the birthday of Mithra, and that the obdurate heathen flatly refused to relinquish their cherished festival. It was not until A.D. 400 that the Church Fathers accepted the inevitable, and tactfully adopted the Birthday of Mithra as the official Birthday of Christianity. At the beginning of the fifth century, S. Chrysostom, referring to the festival of the pagan Sun god, wrote: 'On this day also the birthday of Christ *was lately fixed* at Rome in order that, while the heathens were busy with their profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their sacred rites undisturbed. They call this (December 25th) the birthday of the Invincible One (Mithra); but who is so invincible as the Lord? They call

[1] BUSUTTIL, *Holiday Customs in Malta.*

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

it the Birthday of the Solar Disc; but Christ is the Sun of Righteousness' " (S. HEATH, *Romance of Symbolism*).[1]

We cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, connect the vampire *Gaugau* with Christianity; but with Mithra the affair becomes quite different. It is not difficult to connect a child born on the eve of the Birth-feast of the bloodthirsty Mithra with something more terrible than "ghostly pranks." It is comforting to hear that the vampire *Gaugau* is now capable of nothing worse than "frightening people with his groanings!"

There was a time before the dread broom of "Progress" began to sweep all peasant customs—good as well as bad—before it, when the newly-delivered mother kept carefully to her house during forty days for fear of meeting another mother who had been confined on the same day. It was believed that of two such women meeting within forty days of their confinement, one would suffer a great misfortune. Two possible reasons for this quaint prohibition are apparent. It was either some remnant of a primitive, levitical period of purification or a means of ensuring that the mother wasted no time gossiping at the doorway or in the market place, to the neglect of her young family.

GROWING UP

With the child's first birthday comes the *'uccija*, or "choosing." A tray or basket is filled with an assortment of articles representing trades and professions—a book, a rosary, a candle, an inkstand, a sword—whichever the baby first picks up will indicate its bent in life. This simple means of divination is widespread, and little need be said of it except that some grains of corn are sometimes introduced as a symbol of generosity, suggesting that at one time the *'uccija* decided

[1] M. BAYLEY, *The Lost Language of Symbolism*.